

Response to Brooke Serious Case Review by Bristol Safeguarding Children Board

Introduction

This serious case review (SCR) concerns the exploitation and sexual abuse of a number of children within Bristol. Some of the children concerned were exploited and abused in Bristol, but came from another Local Authority area and were placed out of area in Bristol.

The abuse was committed by a number of young males and the perpetrators have received significant custodial sentences (totalling 116 years). The convictions were achieved by Avon and Somerset Police following the establishment of a major criminal investigation. Working with strategic partner agencies in a gold command group, the investigation was undertaken with significant support to the children who were victims and are now survivors of the exploitation and sexual abuse.

The serious case review was commissioned by Bristol Safeguarding Children Board and another Local Safeguarding Children Board¹ (“LSCB”) in March 2014. The criteria to undertake a serious case review was met because of the gravity of the harm that had been inflicted upon a number of children. Whilst no children died as a result of the abuse they were subjected to, it is important to understand the seriousness of the abuse and harm they suffered at the hands of those who in some cases they trusted and cared about. The impact on these children cannot be underestimated.

The complexity of the criminal investigation and the need to undertake the review in partnership with another LSCB has presented a number of challenges. The review has involved two LSCBs and staff from two children’s social care departments, a number of GP surgeries, three schools, two police constabularies, the National Probation Service, sexual health services, and Barnardo’s. The review was undertaken jointly with each LSCB appointing champions to ensure that the process of the review was thorough and well coordinated. Prior to the commencement of the review a Joint Operational Group was established comprising membership of senior staff from each LSCB area and partner agencies involved. This group was chaired by the legal advisor to the Bristol Board and tasked to ensure that the process for managing the review was well planned and that full account was taken of findings from previous reviews that had taken place into Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in other parts of the country. Advice was also sought from the SCR National Panel and the Department for Education regarding how to approach a joint review using a systems approach.

¹ A High Court injunction prevents the naming of this LSCB in order to safeguard the children from that Local Authority area.

The review decided to focus in depth on three children who had been sexually abused and exploited. One of the children was from the other Local Authority area and was a Looked After child who had been placed in Bristol in supported accommodation on her own, where she soon came under the influence of a group involved in drug dealing and who quickly began to sexually exploit her. Two further children from Bristol were identified by the Safeguarding Children Board Serious Case Review Sub Group in order to provide a depth of focus for the review. Several other children who were also exploited and abused by the same perpetrators have made valuable contributions to the review process. The involvement of all of the children who have felt able to contribute to the review is greatly appreciated by Bristol Safeguarding Children Board.

The complexity of the review and the need to await the outcome of the criminal proceedings, which has comprised three trials, created an unavoidable delay in completing the review. The process started in August 2014 and concluded with the presentation of the review report to the Board in January 2016. The review consulted with the officers leading the police investigation to ensure that progress could be made as quickly as possible without prejudicing the prosecution process.

This review has highlighted the complexity that practitioners in many areas such as social work, police, schools and health provision experience in encountering child sexual exploitation. Practitioners faced challenges in understanding and identifying when a child is being sexually exploited. The challenge of understanding the difference between a troublesome and a troubled child, which could result in punitive rather than a more supportive response, and identifying when sexual behaviour is coercive exploitation and not consensual peer relationships or experimentation were features of some practice.

The scope of the review sought to establish the following:

What are the strengths and gaps in the current multi-agency strategic and operational response to Child Sexual Exploitation in Bristol and the other Local Authority?

The statutory guidance² published in 2013, which has since been superseded, required that serious case reviews be conducted in a way which:

- recognises the complex circumstances in which professionals work together to safeguard children;
- seeks to understand precisely who did what and the underlying reasons that led individuals and organisations to act as they did;
- seeks to understand practice from the viewpoint of the individuals and organisations involved at the time rather than using hindsight;

² Working Together, 2013, Department for Education.

- is transparent about the way data is collected and analysed; and
- makes use of relevant research and case evidence to inform the findings.

LSCBs may use any learning model which is consistent with the principles in this guidance, including the systems methodology recommended by Professor Munro.

Bristol Safeguarding Children Board published a Learning and Improvement Framework in 2014 which specified that the preferred methodology for all serious case reviews would be the SCIE: Learning Together³ methodology. This approach aims to understand professional practice in context, identifying factors within the 'system' that influence the quality of the work with children and their families. It actively seeks to avoid the use of hindsight bias within its analysis in order to better understand the issues being faced at the time.

The report is being published by Bristol following consultation with the children and families that have contributed to the review.

An action plan has been developed by the Board in response to the review's findings as they apply to Bristol.

The plan incorporates those actions that have already been taken by the Board, and other agencies within Bristol.

Findings

Finding 1

The multi-agency system is not set up to provide an effective response for adolescents (including those at risk of CSE) with a complexity of needs at the time and pace they need it, leaving children with a fragmented and reactive response to different aspects of their behaviour.

Issues for Consideration by the Board

How will the Board support and monitor the extent to which services for adolescents are provided collaboratively, working in alignment and sharing information appropriately?

How does the LSCB assure itself that the DFE 2014 guidance has been implemented sufficiently for children who go missing, runaway or are absent and those children will be effectively safeguarded?

³ <http://www.scie.org.uk/children/learningtogether/>

How can services be provided that better meet the needs of vulnerable adolescents: this would involve the provision of a flexible focussed relationship based service model, available out of normal working hours and through a 'one stop shop'?

Do all agencies provide effective reflective supervision and support to staff working with vulnerable adolescents?

BSCB Response

The Board is aware that many adolescents have only recently begun to receive sufficient attention in respect of the vulnerabilities and challenges they face. In relation to the risk of abuse and understanding the complexity of needs they can face, the Board has responded with a range of measures to better equip staff to understand and meet needs as follows:

- The BSCB training section has introduced a new training course, Vulnerabilities in Adolescence. This will support staff in better understanding the complexity of needs of some adolescents. The impact this training has on practice and the difference it makes to children will be monitored by the Board's Training sub group.
- Following the launch of the BSCB CSE strategy in 2015, the BSCB CSE Sub Group will continue to monitor and oversee collaboration between agencies. This is being done to ensure that service provision and information sharing, especially in respect of those at risk of CSE, those believed to be perpetrators, and locations that are frequented by those at risk and perpetrators are shared and effective responses implemented to protect children in Bristol.
- A task group will be convened in order to fully scope the views and needs of young people for more flexible services. The task group will bring to the fore young people's voices through consultation with the Shadow Board (our young people's Board) and specific young people groups, Barnardo's, Local Authority social care and commissioning. Their views will shape a relevant commissioning proposal for the Children and Families Board.
- The Board Missing from Home and Care Task group action plan reflects the 2014 Government guidance which aims to effectively safeguard children who have gone missing from home and care. Progress has already been made in a number of areas. The guidance states Return Interviews should be offered to young people who go missing. A Return Interview is an in-depth interview carried out by an independent person to explore in more depth some of the reasons why a child may have opted to run away or go missing with the aim to address the factors and reduce the risk of a child running away again. A system of offering Return Interviews to all those children who meet the criteria has now been established and the numbers and quality of the Return Interviews in terms of reducing risk are monitored. The Board is also monitoring how many young people refuse Return Interviews and the push and pull factors for young people that runaway. This will support not only risk planning for

individual children but also support strategic planning. We are also examining issues that affect children missing education as we know there is often a link between children that go missing from home and those that go missing from education.

- The action plan focuses upon looked after children who are placed in foster care or children's homes outside of Bristol as well as children placed in Bristol from other areas. Measures to ensure schools have daily information about pupils who have been reported missing are a priority and the effect of this an important area to be monitored.
- The use of supervision can mean different things in different professions and agencies. The Board will deploy S.11 audit⁴ and Schools Safeguarding audit⁵ to identify any gaps in practice across agencies and better understand which agencies provide reflective supervision and which do not. The Board will examine and promote the evidence base supporting the position that reflective supervision can have a positive impact on practice and outcomes for children.

Finding 2

A confused and confusing stance in national policy about adolescent sexual activity leaves professionals and managers struggling to recognise and distinguish between sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and/or underage sexual activity; this risks leaving some children at continued risk of exploitation in the mistaken belief they are involved in consensual activity.

Issues for Consideration by the Board

How can the workforce be equipped with the necessary skills to enable them to support children in being able to speak about sexual behaviour without embarrassment?

How can the Board be confident that staff are supported to be able to identify and report suspicions of sexual abuse (including exploitation) and understand the distinctions between different types of sexual abuse?

Are child sexual exploitation screening tools being used effectively by practitioners?

How can the Board be assured that schools and post 16 providers are supporting children in relation to the risks around what is 'safe' and what could be harmful in sexual behaviour and that additional educational messages are being promoted via public health?

BSCB Response

The BSCB consider it essential that anyone who works with children is equipped to respond effectively to suspicions and concerns relating to sexual activity. In particular we will

⁴ S.11 Audit: an audit undertaken by the LSCB of partner agencies compliance with S.11 Children Act 2004. It requires partners to undertake a self-evaluation of and develop an improvement plan to address areas where they consider they need to improve.

⁵ Schools Safeguarding Audit – an annual audit undertaken by the LSCB of schools in Bristol to determine their compliance with s.157 and S.175 Education Act 2002

continue work to assure that staff are equipped to work effectively with children and young people in identifying and responding to sexual behaviour that could indicate that a child is at risk of abuse or exploitation as follows:

- Staff delivering Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education within schools must be trained to communicate effectively the risks relating to sexual exploitation and promote healthy relationships. The Board will continue to support the work of the Local Authority Public Health team in supporting the provision of PSHE in all Bristol schools and seek assurance that PSHE lessons deliver messages about healthy relationships.
- BSCB will encourage the provision of training using role play for all staff who work directly with children. This can be delivered through both single agency and BSCB training provision. Using methods such as role play will support staff in being able to address difficult subjects with children with little embarrassment.
- The Board will enable young people to support the training provided within schools and deliver these messages through peer support. The Board will work with schools to deliver the key messages relating to CSE and healthy relationships in creative ways to children.
- The BSCB will support local and national campaign work to encourage the reporting of concerns regarding sexual exploitation. In order to reach a wider audience this will include messages from young people (Shadow Board/Integrate).
- The BSCB Training and Development Sub Group alongside the CSE Sub Group will build upon previous learning activity to ensure that training regarding CSE and adolescent vulnerability is coordinated and reaches all areas of the workforce, as well as those working in various parts of the night time economy in Bristol.
- The CSE Sub Group will continue to monitor and approve tools that are being used in all agencies to assist with the recognition of the risk of CSE.

Finding 3

The child protection process in England has primarily been designed for familial child abuse/neglect; in the absence of concerns about abuse or neglect by parents/carers, victims of sexual exploitation are likely to receive an inconsistent response to their safeguarding needs.

Issues for Consideration by the Board

To what extent is the entire child protection system being used for planning for older children?

Are the child protection needs of Looked After children recognised and addressed in the same manner as for children in the wider community?

BSCB Response

It is the expectation that the child protection process is used where appropriate to manage and reduce the risk of harm to children who are at risk. The use of these established procedures is imperative regardless of circumstance where the perpetrator of alleged abuse is outside of the family or from within. The Board will reinforce this requirement with all partner agencies.

BSCB will assist the local authority with training, briefings and clear instructions to social workers about using the Child Protection process effectively for older children and those at risk of CSE, specifically in situations where the family are not responsible for the risk of harm to the child. The use of the child protection process for alleged abuse outside of the family home for older children will be audited to ensure compliance with the procedures.

- This training and instruction will also be reinforced to staff across all agencies including: health providers and education settings who have contact with children in care.
- The Board will ensure there is a clear understanding of the use of S20 accommodation/ and support requirements for older children and highlight other protective measures that can be taken through use of Inherent Jurisdiction of the High Court. Joint agency guidelines have developed and published by the Board to support this.

Finding 4

In cases involving sexual exploitation, there is a pattern of focusing primarily on trying to stop victims having further involvement with perpetrators, and less on the prevention of the abuse in the first place and the disrupting and prosecuting of perpetrators: this means victims often continue to be at continual risk of abuse by the same perpetrators.

Issues for Consideration by the Board

Is the Board assured that there is sufficient priority given to educating children and their parents about healthy relationships and the risks of child sexual exploitation?

How is the use of social media being understood in multi-agency practice; what is expected of practitioners and agencies to keep children safe and assess risks?

Do practitioners have the skills to be able to do this?

What understanding is there about the profile of perpetrators in the area?

Are there robust disruption processes to act as a deterrent?

Have the police got adequate resources to undertake pro-active policing and investigate without an allegation/disclosure?

BSCB Response

The BSCB published a CSE strategy at its annual conference in July 2015. Within this strategy there exists a clear commitment to implement effective measures to prevent CSE from happening and enact more robust measures to disrupt the activities of those suspected of grooming and sexually exploiting children through the following actions:

- Services are in place for parents whose children are identified as at risk of CSE. This is through the 'Think Family' Early Intervention project which works with families where CSE is a risk indicator. Where young people have been assessed as having a heightened risk score of vulnerability to child sexual exploitation they are reviewed by the Early Help service. For those where a current lead professional is not identified then the Early Help family services review each case with other professionals to decide whether to work with the family proactively. This means a key worker being allocated to work with the family for between 3 months to a year.
- The BSCB CSE Sub Group has researched current provision for children who are victims of CSE. The group will scope current provision across the city to ensure professionals understand what is on offer for parents and carers of children who are at risk or are victims of CSE.
- Where there is a clear gap in support identified by the CSE Sub Group, the group will promote further support services for parents. This can be achieved through schools engaging parents in advice and support about healthy relationships, Bristol Youth Links services' engagement with parents, Public Health messages to parents and Children's Centres involvement.
- The Board's E-Safety Sub Group supports professionals in understanding and assessing the risks that unsafe use of social media can involve. Alongside this action plan BSCB are commissioning training for professionals to further improve their understanding and ability to assess the risks involved in social media.
- A profile of CSE across Bristol is being undertaken by police. When completed this is to be studied by CSE Sub Group and recommendations to BSCB will be made to inform strategic planning. The 'Think Family' Early Intervention Project has undertaken a valuable and detailed risk profiling to identify those children at most risk of CSE.
- The Avon and Somerset Police led innovation fund project is leading on the establishment of CSE network meetings supported by the BSCB CSE Sub Group. These will improve the understanding of how perpetrators and victims are associated in order to provide local profile. This will further inform strategic and tactical responses to effectively disrupt the activity of perpetrators.

- In Plain Sight⁶ worker will also inform the CSE sub group regarding the activity of suspected perpetrators and locations where there has been problematic behaviour related to CSE.
- Guidelines have been developed by Bristol City Council lawyers with Avon and Somerset Police Lawyers and Officers to clarify and agree a process for the use of legislation and the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court to target and disrupt suspected perpetrators. This has been approved by the Board and published on its web pages.
- The above activity will establish the evidence base for increasingly robust responses and provide information to enable the local authority and police to effectively disrupt the activity of perpetrators and support investigations that are intelligence led.

Finding 5

Our current working methods and recording systems do not reliably identify patterns in individual and group behaviour. This reduces the chances of a timely response in the detection of victims and perpetrators of child sexual exploitation and leads to a more reactive rather than proactive approach.

Issues for Consideration by the Board

How effective are current local processes (including those of sexual health agencies) for identifying patterns of individual and group behaviour? Consideration needs to be given to:

- Analysis tools for identifying and linking patterns between individuals
- Analysis tools for identifying individual patterns of behaviour
- Information sharing
- Current arrangements for information sharing by sexual health providers
- Is the Board reassured that all agencies have early help systems in place where risks are indicated?
- Better use of inter-agency chronologies.

BSCB Response

BSCB recently updated guidance provides advice regarding the use of the most up to date and effective tools to assist professionals in identifying children at risk of CSE as follows:

- Individual agencies have identified the most appropriate tools to be used according to the context whereby they meet children. (see Finding 2). These include ‘spotting

⁶ http://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/Barnardo8217s_awarded_736154_to_protect_children_at_night_/latest-news.htm?ref=103413

the signs⁷ used by health providers and the National Working Group CSE Checklist which has been adopted and implemented into children's social care systems.

- More robust processes for sharing intelligence with the police regarding suspects will be embedded across all agencies. A draft process is currently being considered by the CSE Sub Group.
- The CSE Sub Group has an ongoing focus on improving arrangements for health providers to share information, including by sexual health service providers.
- The Think Family Early intervention project has already developed a system for the early identification of those children most likely to be at risk of CSE. The predictive analytical tool developed between the Police and Early Help focuses on the social profiles of young people who have been sexually exploited and it is then able to risk assess the entire database of every young person across the city to establish those who have a heightened risk score of vulnerability to child sexual exploitation. This information is then extracted in to a user friendly dashboard. For those most at risk who do not have a current lead professional then family services review each case with other professionals to decide whether to work with the family proactively. This means a key worker being allocated to the work with the family for between 3 months to a year. Information about the risk scores is shared with appropriate professionals working with young people to ensure appropriate decisions can be made about accessing support services for those most at risk. Schools are made aware of the pupils attending who demonstrate high risk to ensure they can review the support available. The information is also analysed to understand which schools hold the most risk and training for school staff is then focused on the schools who need the most support.
- The BSCB supports the development of the 'Connecting Care project' which is an important initiative in establishing the provision and use of accessible multi-agency chronologies.

Finding 6

The decision to make the investigation of these crimes into a complex investigation in May 2013 enabled the police to adequately resource an enquiry, which led to the successful prosecution of the offenders and the co-ordinated multi-agency support for the victims.

Issues for Consideration by the Board

Is the Board assured that there is sufficient priority and expertise consistently available to enable the criminal investigation of child sexual exploitation?

⁷ <https://www.brook.org.uk/our-work/spotting-the-signs-cse-national-proforma>

BSCB Response

It remains important that the police continue to be able to identify sufficient resources and expertise to pursue, prosecute and disrupt those engaged in sexual exploitation of children.

Information provided to the police through sharing of intelligence, the operation of the CSE network meetings and better identification of those at risk of CSE will enable the police to respond robustly and effectively. The Board will ask the police to report to the Board about ability to prioritise and undertake continuous investigations.

Avon and Somerset Police launched pioneering new West of England child sexual exploitation (CSE) service working across Avon and Somerset, Wiltshire and Swindon to identify and support young victims of child sexual exploitation. Launched in April 2015, the service has 15 dedicated support workers. The project has also trained over 350 professionals who work with children to recognise and respond to the signs of CSE. The service is a collaboration of Avon and Somerset and Wiltshire Police forces, Barnardo's and the seven local authorities covering the two police areas. It has been funded by both Avon and Somerset and Wiltshire Police and Crime Commissioners, the local authorities, Barnardo's and the Home Office Innovation Fund.

Finding 7

Locally LSCBs and the wider multi-agency partnership have collaborated to develop CSE/Missing strategy and action plans but these take time to embed so there is a disconnect between strategic understanding to drive improvement and the reality on the front line.

Issues for Consideration by the Board

Is the Board reassured that there is now a robust CSE strategy to coordinate and measure the impact of services to tackle CSE and to support children who go missing from home or care?

How is the Board reassured that staff across the partnership are receiving consistent and effective training on:

- CSE
- children missing from home and care,
- trafficking of human beings and
- that the impact on practice and outcomes for children are clearly understood

To what extent is the national/ local political agenda, including financial cuts to services in local areas impacting on keeping children safe generally and specifically regarding Child Sexual Exploitation?

Is the Board confident that member agencies understand the need for consultation and communication with partner agencies when reconfiguring services that will impact on joint working?

BSCB Response

The BSCB published and launched its CSE strategy at the annual conference in July 2015. This strategy has been well received both locally and by central government. As part of the Government's attempt to understand what was needed to tackle CSE a Cross-Government project team was established reporting to the Home Secretary and the Secretaries of State of Education, Communities and Local Government, and Health. Bristol was selected as one of the 12 LAs to be involved in this project and the CSE strategy and action plan were praised by the team.

The Board is now at the stage of seeking assurances that all partners continue to work effectively together in order to ensure that the strategy is embedded in practice.

- An action plan that reflects the aims of the strategy is in place and the CSE sub group will ensure that the strategy is embedded and its effectiveness audited.
- Training is delivered by BSCB on CSE, Missing and Trafficking.
- Training is delivered by 4YP (public Health sexual health information service in Bristol) on CSE.
- Training to schools is provided by the safeguarding in education team. For those agencies that find it difficult to attend there has been flexibility in the provision of training methods to meet the needs of all agencies.
- The licensing team in the local authority, in partnership with Barnardo's, have worked effectively to ensure training in relation to CSE and the needs of vulnerable children is part of the training of taxi drivers.
- Barnardo's have also made significant efforts in reaching and providing training to hotels, security firms and licensed premises.
- CSE is one of the BSCB priorities and locally CSE is a high priority for the local authority and the police. Awareness raising across partner agencies has had impact, illustrated by increased referrals to local authority First Response (initial point of contact service for referrals and requests for help in Bristol) and BASE. It is positive that there has been an improvement in the recognition and reporting of CSE, which will inform the business case for professional capacity required. The CSE Sub Group will establish a task group to inform commissioning arrangements for services to vulnerable adolescents (see Finding 1).
- The implications of individual agency restructure for multi-agency safeguarding provision is addressed within the BSCB business plan. When an agency is planning a restructure of services they are expected to provide the BSCB with sufficient notice and consultation in respect of the impact on multi-agency safeguarding work.

Conclusion

The Board will ensure that the actions above will be overseen by the Serious Case Review Sub Group and any exceptions indicating a failure to progress or implement an action for whatever reason will be brought to the attention of the full Board in order to progress.

The CSE Sub Group will continue its work to improve the multiagency response to CSE within Bristol and seek to improve the identification of those at risk, prevent the exploitation and abuse of those at risk, protect those who have been abused from further harm and disrupt and bring to justice those who seek to abuse and exploit any child in Bristol.